



SURVEY RESULTS REPORT

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF LEARNING LOSS AND GAINS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BERKELEY STUDENT LEARNING CENTER | MARCH 31, 2022

Mike Leong, Math/Statistics Director
Khuyen Vu Nguyen, Executive Associate Director
Cara Stanley, Executive Director



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

On 10 December 2021, in support of the work of the First-Year Undergraduate Experience Task Force, the Student Learning Center (SLC) launched a pilot pulse survey to gauge student perception of learning loss and gains under Covid-related learning conditions. The survey was sent to approximately 10,000 Cal undergraduates—primarily peer staff and active users of SLC academic support services—and was closed after 72 hours. “Pulse” because we designed it to quickly reveal a *broad* and *general* sense of how students perceived their learning experiences during the pandemic, prior to their return to campus for hybrid instruction in Fall 2021. We received 850 responses and 1838 open-ended comments in total, a number that surpassed our expectations given the timing of the launch (during RRR week) and the brief duration of the survey (three days).

KEY FINDINGS

1. With 850 respondents, this pilot pulse survey on undergraduate perception of COVID-related learning gains and loss is the first optional survey at UC Berkeley
2. Based on the definition of learning loss as “any specific or general loss of knowledge and skills, or to reversals in academic progress, most commonly due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student’s education,” 78.8% of respondents believed strongly or somewhat strongly that they experienced a loss of learning due to virtual instruction.
3. Types of learning loss reported range from diminished learning skills to diminished academic confidence, motivation, and focus. Specific contributing factors include lack of opportunity for social interaction, lack of learning structure, excessive screen time/other technical difficulties, and diminished quality of instruction.
4. Of the 21.2% of respondents who did not believe they experienced learning loss due to virtual learning, many reported gains from this learning format. Several cited accessibility, flexibility, convenience, and the ability to customize their learning preferences to their learning needs as contributing factors to their gains.
5. 77.3% of respondents believed strongly or somewhat strongly that COVID - related social isolation contributed to their learning loss.
6. Of the 22.7% of respondents who did not believe COVID -related social isolation contributed to their learning loss, many attributed it to the fact that they discovered new ways to connect or reconnect with others. Some expressed that being socially connected was not important to them.

7. 73.3% believed strongly or somewhat strongly that they experienced learning loss due to general COVID-related stressors. The types of stressors reported include contracting COVID, fear of contracting COVID, general stress and anxiety navigating pandemic living, lack of access to technology and space to engage in online learning, lack of academic support resources, difficulty navigating virtual/hybrid instruction, and difficulty making the transition back to in-person learning.
8. Of the 26.7% of respondents who did not believe they experienced learning loss due to general COVID-related stressors, some said they preferred online learning while others expressed feeling fortunate and privileged for being protected from COVID-related misfortunes.
9. 77.8% of respondents believed strongly or somewhat strongly that COVID-related learning conditions resulted in other types of learning, such as enhanced technical skills and ability to navigate online learning; enhanced ability to cope with change and life challenges; increased self-efficacy and resourcefulness; enhanced self- and time-management skills; increased resilience; increased motivation to prioritize mental and physical wellbeing for self and others; enhanced appreciation for family and friends; increased social and political awareness; and enhanced knowledge of self as a learner and human being.

METHODOLOGY

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument included four questions, each with a three-point response scale from “strongly agree” to “not at all strongly agree.” The questions solicit perceptions of learning loss and/or gains as a result of (1) virtual learning, (2) COVID-related isolation, (3) COVID-induced stressors, and (4) other COVID-related learning conditions. An additional open-ended item soliciting elaboration follows each question. The academic profile questionnaire included five items, tracking academic standing, major status, total semester(s) of attendance at Cal, and total semester(s) of virtual learning at Cal.

Drawing on the [Glossary of Education Reform](#), the survey defines learning loss as “any specific or general loss of knowledge and skills, or to reversals in academic progress, most commonly due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student’s education.”

POPULATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The survey was created using Google Forms, which was set to:

- Automatically collect email addresses
- Send responders a copy of their response, when requested

- Allow response editing
- Restrict to users in UC Berkeley and its trusted organizations
- Limit to 1 response per responder

The survey was made available to the entire SLC community of over 10,000 current users and peer staff. It is unclear how many other undergraduates were forwarded the survey by a member of the SLC community.

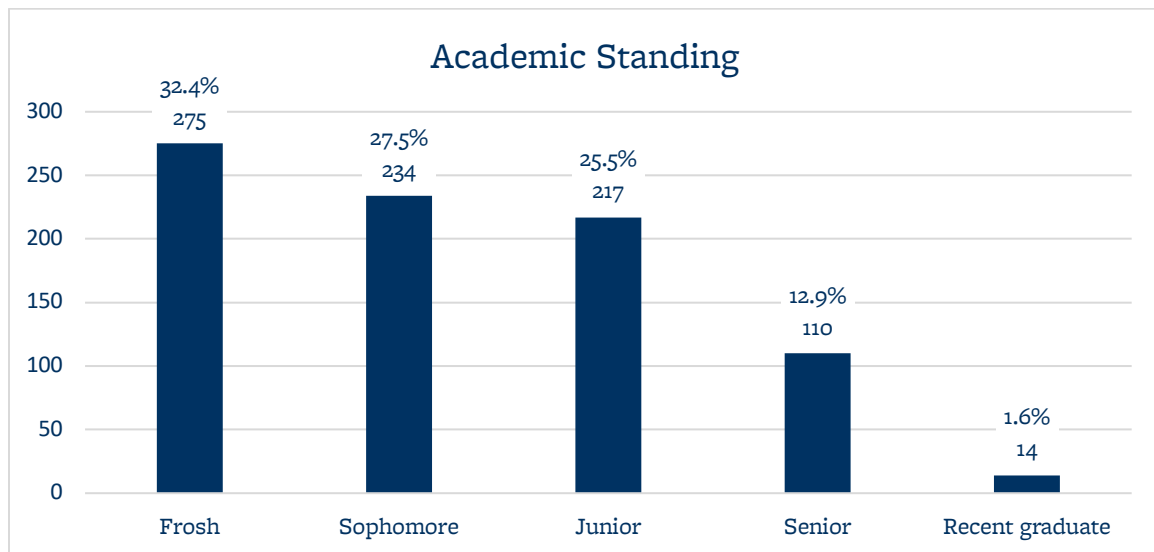
LIMITATIONS

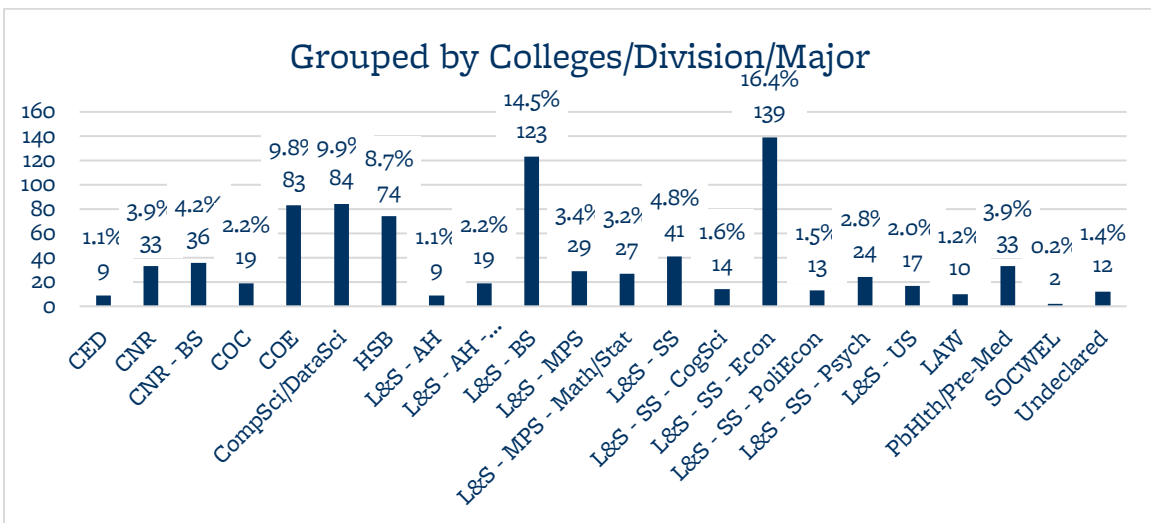
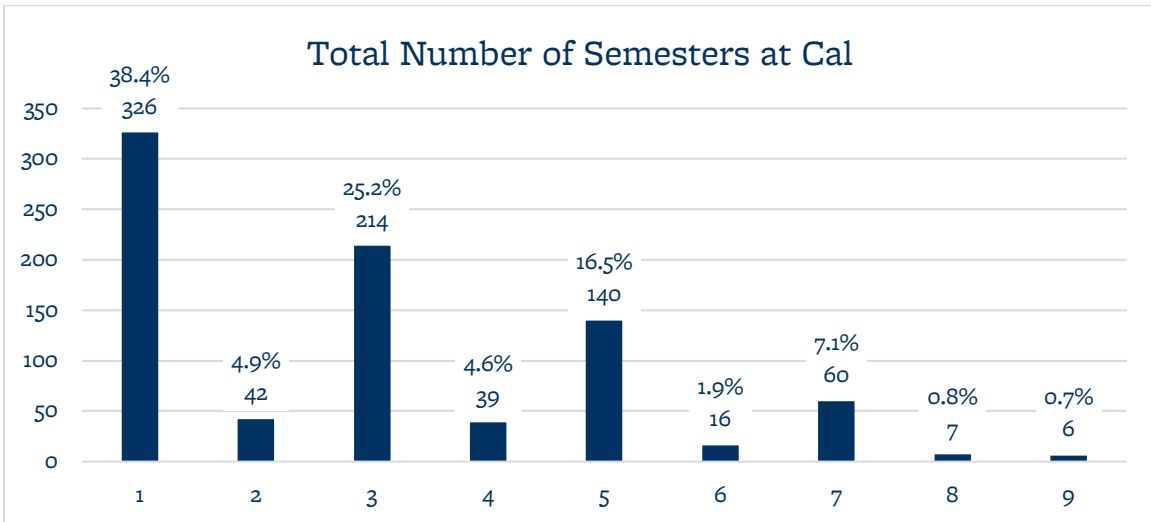
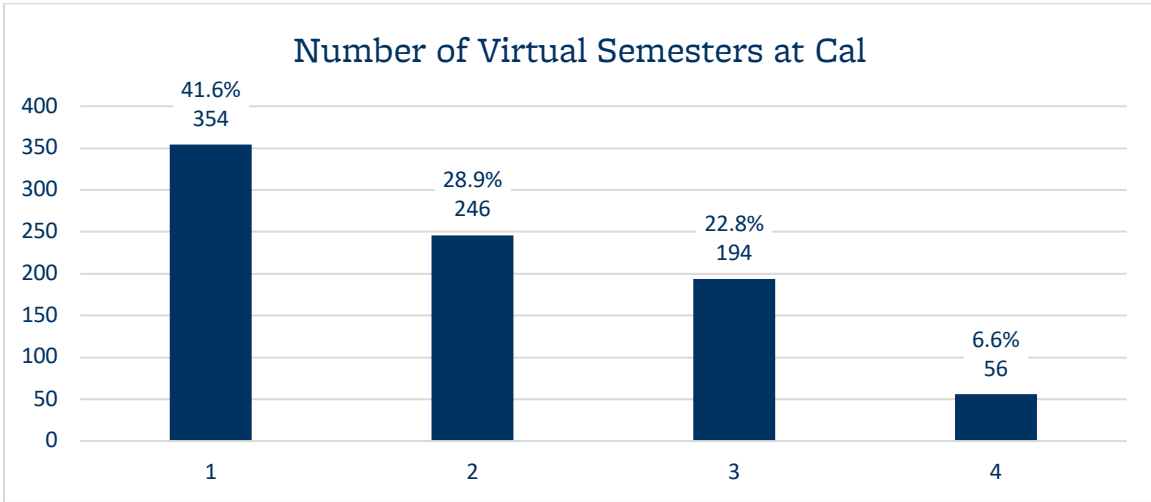
Participation in this survey was voluntary, and was limited only to Cal undergraduates to whom SLC had access. The survey was not conducted as an academic research study or formal institutional research and did not collect demographic information. In addition, the timing and duration of the survey were less than ideal, being launched in the middle of RRR week and kept open for only 72 hours.

Only 8.5% of the surveyed population completed the survey. Therefore, the results only reflect the sentiment of those who completed the survey. Reported numbers are unweighted and do not attempt to account for differential response rates.

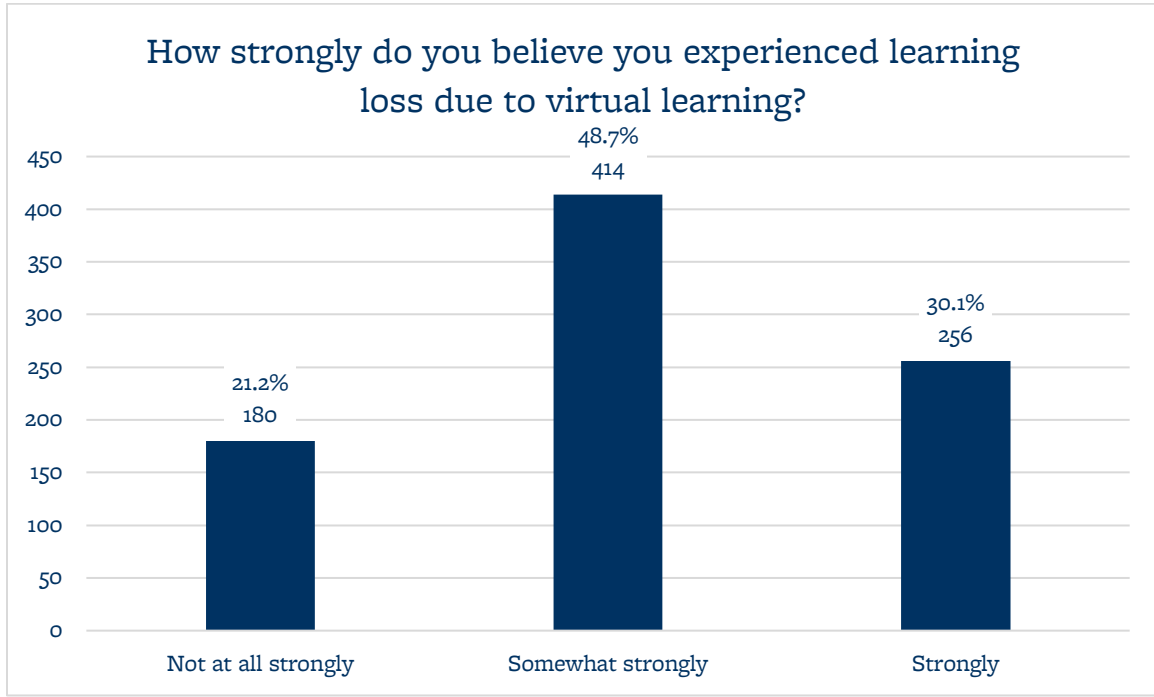
RESULTS

RESPONDENT PROFILE





QUESTION 1



Response	Frequency	Percent	Number of Comments
Not at all strongly	180	21.2%	105
Somewhat strongly	414	48.7%	252
Strongly	256	30.1%	155
Total	850	100.0%	512

Select comments from respondents who strongly believed they experienced learning loss due to virtual learning (10/155):

<i>During the pandemic, I didn't really feel engaged with the content I was learning online. I felt as though I was studying it just to pass my classes, and not because I was genuinely interested or passionate about the content I was being taught in my classes.</i>
<i>I believe that I wasn't given the same lessons and classroom experiences as I otherwise would have had.</i>
<i>I did not have a chance to develop my communication and team work skills as much, therefore I did not participate as much in class.</i>
<i>All the labs that became online were hard to retain information later on because the in-person experience was needed for more understanding.</i>
<i>During virtual classes, I felt very unmotivated to do work and would fall behind on lectures before something like an exam was coming up. Then I would start watching all the lectures I missed at once. This became a routine and I felt that I wasn't really</i>

<i>learning but just memorizing information that I needed for a day and then forgot everything to memorize the next thing.</i>
<i>Online learning does not sufficiently provide students with the skills to master the work they are doing.</i>
<i>I don't think we retain as much info and knowledge when it's hard to enjoy what we learn and deal with the problems that come with sitting and being on a computer for hours and hours (e.g. back pain and eye strain)</i>
<i>As an international student, I felt like I was at a disadvantage because a lot of virtual activities and resources were still not available to me due to time zone differences. Moreover, I still had to take tests and submit assignments at less flexible deadlines, meaning that I was more focused on the product rather than the learning process.</i>
<i>I feel like my ability to stay focused with online classes has severely been depleted, and I have not been able to be as engaged in my classes. The student-teacher and student-student interactions have also decreased, which has hindered my learning and dropped it below a level it was at pre-COVID</i>
<i>I have ADHD. It's much harder for me to learn online than it is in person. I need an authority figure in the room to make me feel pressure to stay on track. My grades have been slipping due to this point.</i>

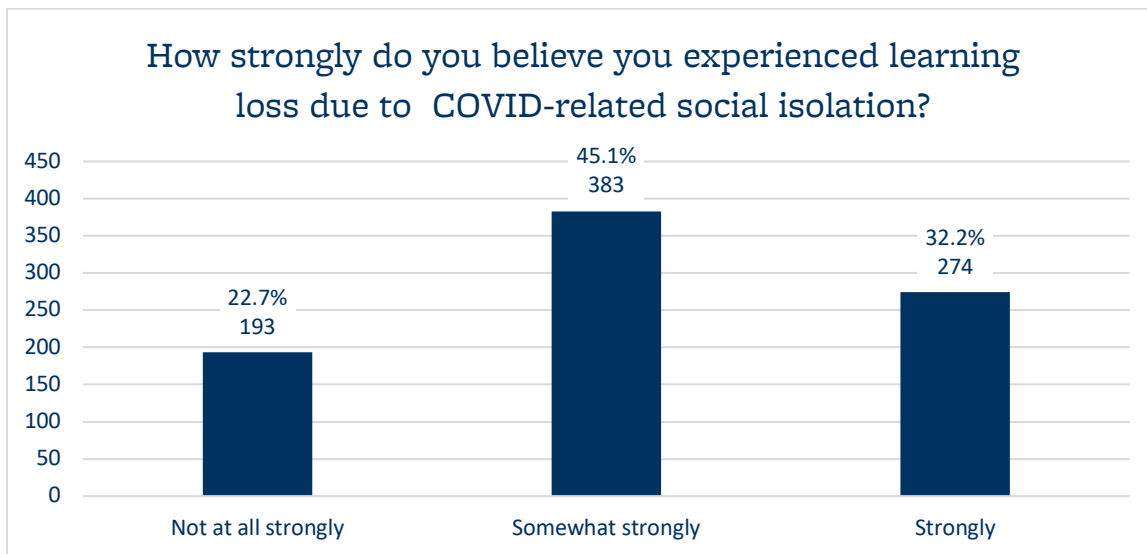
Select comments from respondents who did not believe they experienced learning loss due to virtual learning (10/105):

<i>I really liked virtual learning because it allowed me to pause lecture recordings to truly understand concepts.</i>
<i>Virtual learning helped me attend class more regularly when I was having mental or physical health problems and made some resources more accessible because they were online.</i>
<i>I believe that virtual education can somewhat be more impactful towards my learning rather than in person because I have a more flexible time learning and rewatching lectures that are recorded to learn at my own pace rather than having to learn at a teacher's own pace.</i>
<i>I still believe that some online learning can still be done well! Sometimes it even helps with our schedules as we can shift class times for more flexibility</i>
<i>I flourished during virtual learning because the classes were recorded and accessible later. I prefer learning this way and it worked better with my disability.</i>
<i>I believe that course content carried over well into an online format for virtually all of my classes.</i>
<i>I am a very independent student, so I sometimes preferred the online format for classes because I could learn at my own pace.</i>
<i>I was still able to learn and understand the topics taught. Additionally, virtual office hours allowed me to feel more comfortable in terms of COVID-19 and allowed me to fit going to office hours in my schedule.</i>

Online learning has been even more effective for me because I can revisit recorded material at leisure and less time was spent commuting.

I want more online classes. I work better on my own then with what lectures bring to the table.

QUESTION 2



Response	Frequency	Percent	Number of Comments
Not at all strongly	193	22.7%	107
Somewhat strongly	383	45.1%	209
Strongly	274	32.2%	149
Total	850	100.0%	465

Select comments from respondents who strongly believed they experienced learning loss due to COVID -related social isolation (10/149):

Being alone makes me dumber.

Once again this prohibits me from learning in person for specific classes and I feel like I would do better In Person.

I prefer to study with people so it was hard during isolation.

Missing out on class due to isolation is detrimental because you can't fully experience class lectures and discussions.

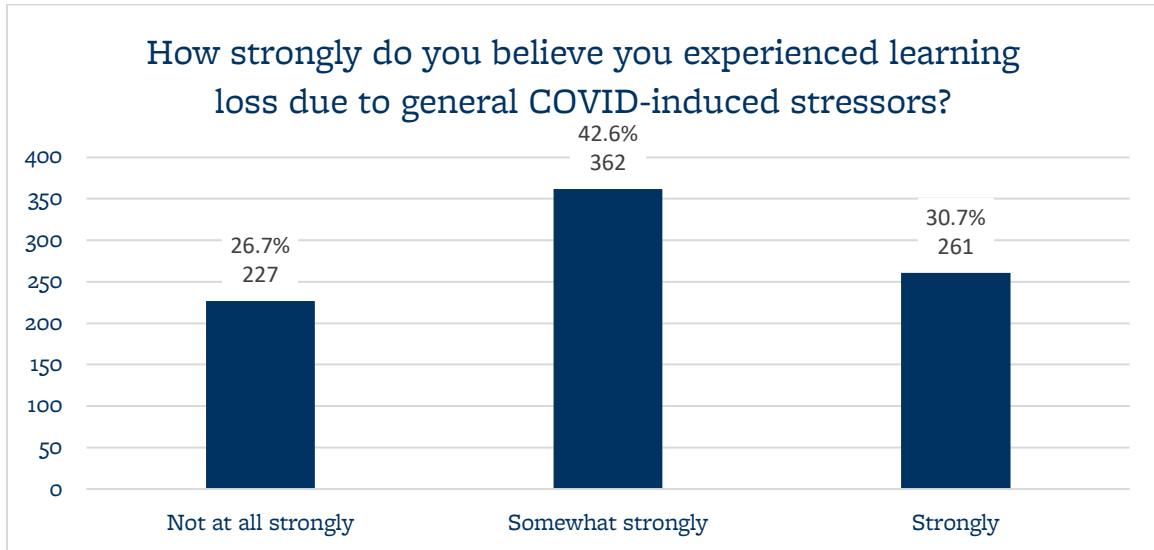
Virtual classes started in the second semester of my freshman year. At this point, I was barely starting to make friends, so when the pandemic started I basically lost communication with anyone from campus and basically only talked to people back home.

<i>Being at home all day also made it extremely difficult to be motivated to focus on school or to do anything in general.</i>
<i>Simply put, it is easier to learn when you have filled your need for belonging (see Maslow's hierarchy of needs!). It is more difficult when this is not fulfilled. Covid and related restrictions impeded (in fact, interrupted a number of friendships during Spring 2020) and is still impeding the process (it's more difficult to approach someone when everyone has a mask!) of making friends or forming a study group for that matter.</i>
<i>Isolation did make me feel less inclined to participate in class, so I may have not gotten the full experience.</i>
<i>Loneliness from isolation was pretty overwhelming in that it took up a lot of brain space. I used to study with my peers. But now, I can't. The class is completely online which makes meeting people hard. Being able to ask someone after class, "Did you get that?" is something I took for granted. It makes a difference.</i>
<i>I felt anxious to talk to people because I was so isolated and overall I had trouble looking and asking for help when I needed it.</i>

Select comments from respondents who did not believe they experienced learning loss due to COVID-related social isolation (10/107):

<i>I was able to keep in touch with some friends and spend time with family during quarantine, so although I did have go through some isolation, I didn't have learning loss.</i>
<i>I would study alone before so it did not change much for me. It was also easy to meet up with people on zoom to go over homework assignments or whatnot</i>
<i>I do my learning quite independently.</i>
<i>Although I felt physically isolated, I still felt like I was able to talk to my peers and work with them academically (even virtually) when I was working on problem sets, projects, or studying. So while my social experience was definitely lacking, I still felt like I was able to access and make use of all the support systems available to me so I could meet my own academic needs.</i>
<i>I believe I had more of a chance to learn because of the isolation because I had more time to study and do work.</i>
<i>I would study alone before so it did not change much for me. It was also easy to meet up with people on zoom to go over homework assignments or whatnot.</i>
<i>Enjoyed the extra time and space for self-reflection</i>
<i>Online learning at Cal is incredible. As long as one is willing to adjust to the academic environment, it won't matter whether you're learning in-person or online.</i>
<i>Social isolation was not an issue, I enjoy working alone.</i>
<i>Although I felt physically isolated, I still felt like I was able to talk to my peers and work with them academically (even virtually) when I was working on problem sets, projects, or studying. So while my social experience was definitely lacking, I still felt like I was able to access and make use of all the support systems available to me so I could meet my own academic needs.</i>

QUESTION 3



Response	Frequency	Percent	Number of Comments
Not at all strongly	227	26.7%	118
Somewhat strongly	362	42.6%	160
Strongly	261	30.7%	137
Total	850	100.0%	415

Select comments from respondents who strongly believed they experienced learning loss due to COVID-related stressors (10/137):

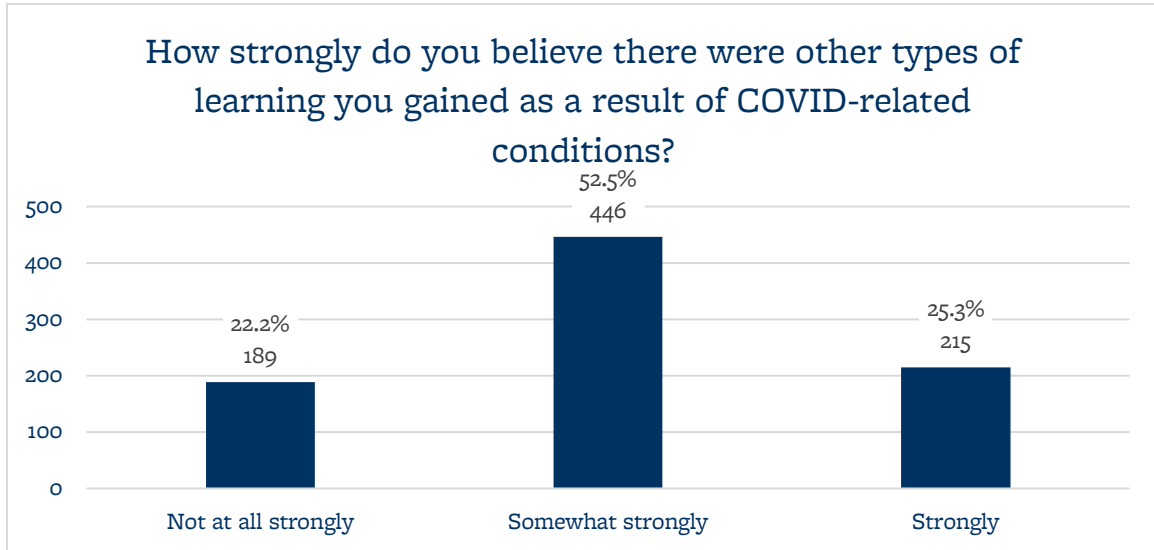
<i>It's hard worrying about school when you're also concerned about contracting a deadly virus.</i>
<i>School was sometimes much harder to focus on due to news and personal events related to COVID.</i>
<i>The isolation affected my learning capabilities because my mental health was bad.</i>
<i>I think COVID caused a lot of anxiety whenever it was during midterm season or finals week because there was a lack of resources that were made accessible to students.</i>
<i>I've gotten bad anxiety from covid. When I am in class I get scared of catching it and can't focus sometimes.</i>
<i>Though I am vaccinated it is scary to go to class and still be graded on attendance when there is a risk of getting sick.</i>
<i>There were many health complications in my environment that translated into additional stress during my studies. In turn, as I mentioned before, I was more focused on getting assignments done rather than the quality.</i>

<i>It became much harder to cope with school due to Covid-induced stressors. At one point in the semester my entire family had tested positive and my mom was critically ill in the hospital, and I was literally in the middle of finals week; such stressors definitely affected my academic progress.</i>
<i>With everything else going on in the world right now, making learning a priority has been very difficult. It is much harder to put my focus into my studies when I have so many other daily stressors in the way.</i>
<i>I think I feel more stressed this year than I ever have in my life.</i>

Select comments from respondents who did not believe they experienced learning loss due to COVID-related stressors (10/118):

<i>I have not become more stressed due to COVID.</i>
<i>I was lucky that COVID didn't affect my personal life too much and as such, my learning wasn't stunted because of that.</i>
<i>In general, everyone has to go through the same pandemic so the stress was not just me which made me feel ok. It made me stay inside more and study.</i>
<i>Stayed at home all the time so wasn't worried too much about Covid.</i>
<i>While I was sad about the pandemic, I did not lose class time because of it.</i>
<i>I'm a workaholic actually so I appreciated being able to control my stress working from home.</i>
<i>I think I felt mostly relaxed throughout the lockdowns.</i>
<i>I actually started learning better with COVID because I can focus on a video without outside distractions.</i>
<i>I was lucky and privileged enough to not experience financial, house, or food insecurity. Like everyone else I experienced heightened anxieties, but I count myself as lucky.</i>
<i>Although there was a few scares with relatives related to COVID, I have learned to balance and manage my stress by doing other hobbies along with learning which kept my mind off of it.</i>

QUESTION 4



Response	Frequency	Percent	Number of Comments
Not at all strongly	189	22.2%	72
Somewhat strongly	446	52.5%	243
Strongly	215	25.3%	131
Total	850	100.0%	446

Select comments from respondents who strongly believed they gained other types of learning as a result of COVID-related learning conditions (10/131):

<i>I learned how to find other ways to feel connected to people and feel happy being alone.</i>
<i>I learned how to cope with a variety of stressors and how to utilize a virtual platform most effectively to enrich my learning experience.</i>
<i>I became more in-touch politically as COVID grew from a health issue to a political issue.</i>
<i>The ability to navigate new technological applications (such as zoom), and communicate when separated from others.</i>
<i>I learned to navigate online learning in ways that I wouldn't have bothered learn if COVID didn't force me to. Additionally, I found hobbies that I wouldn't really have thought about before.</i>
<i>Been able to become more techy, work independently, and manage my time better.</i>
<i>Learning to value social relations over academic, learning to navigate online and virtual spaces, learning to do art.</i>

<i>I learned and strengthened my tools for self-discipline and caused me to be creative and determined.</i>
<i>I had to be more disciplined in adjusting to the US time zone while I take classes remotely from Indonesia.</i>
<i>I think we learned of new ways to connect with others and may have picked up some new hobbies and become more tech savvy.</i>

Select comments from respondents who did not believe they gained any learnings as a result of COVID-related learning conditions (10/72):

<i>Nothing much to gain other than learning to isolate yourself during mental health crisis.</i>
<i>COVID only really brought out the worst in terms of my academics. I only found to have been at a disadvantage.</i>
<i>Virtual learning did not really present me with new experiences, except maybe that I learned to work better as an individual because it was much more difficult to collaborate with others.</i>
<i>I doubt I gained any useful skill.</i>
<i>Covid seemed to be a net negative in terms of learning outcomes.</i>
<i>I don't think I was able to learn very much specifically because of COVID.</i>
<i>I lost a lot of my good study habits during Covid</i>
<i>My learning process was definitely impacted negatively as a result and didn't really get any benefits from the experience.</i>
<i>Covid didn't help me learn it only hurt.</i>
<i>I don't think I GAINED any kinds of learning through COVID, I feel as though I have lost learning.</i>

APPENDIX

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS